



Least Terns (*Sternula antillarum*) are very small seabirds that nest in South Carolina. They are about the size of a Cardinal. Their primary food is small fish which they catch by diving into the water. Least terns are found in marine and freshwater environments.

From South and Central America least terns arrive in late March and early April and begin to select nest sites on :

- *sand beaches,*
- *shell rakes,*
- *and flat gravel roofs.*

They prefer areas that are open with little vegetation, and they nest together in a group called a colony.

If you see a group of  
Least Terns flying over a  
roof, please call  
S. C. Department  
of Natural Resources at:

**843-509-4845**

**MartinMC@dnr.sc.gov**

THANK YOU!



Photographs:  
[www.wrightsvillebeachscenicstours.com](http://www.wrightsvillebeachscenicstours.com)  
[floridabirdingtrail.com](http://floridabirdingtrail.com)  
[birdsoflongisland.blogspot.com](http://birdsoflongisland.blogspot.com)  
[birdsasart.com](http://birdsasart.com)  
[blog.catandturtle.net](http://blog.catandturtle.net)  
[www.flicker.com](http://www.flicker.com)

## LEAST TERNS: WHY ARE THOSE BIRDS ON THE ROOF?



# Least Terns



Least Terns nest together in a group which provides better protection from predators.



Least Tern eggs are sand colored with small brown blotches to cryptically match the surrounding substrate.

The nest is a shallow depression in the sand or gravel. Both parents incubate a clutch of 2-3 eggs. The eggs hatch in 19 - 25 days. The hatchling least tern is able to walk and leave the nest in 2 days.



Both parents feed the chicks, and by 20 days they are able to fly. Adults and young will leave the nesting area after about 3-4 weeks.



A young Least Tern

Least terns are listed in South Carolina in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) as a species of "highest priority" and as a state threatened species. It is federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. In addition the Least Tern is listed with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a bird of conservation concern and as a priority species with Partners in Flight.

Least tern populations are declining due to habitat loss which primarily involves beaches for them to nest and raise young. In South Carolina many of the Least Terns nest on flat pebbled roofs in Charleston, Berkeley, Georgetown, and Horry counties. Other Least Terns nest in natural beach areas protected by Federal and State governments such as Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and Botany Bay Plantation Heritage Preserve.